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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review
completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

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SOUTH VIETNAM 1

NVA forces in Quang Tri have established another toehold south of the Thach Han River. The Viet Cong are slow to make appointments to the JMC. The government is going ahead with plans for village elections sometime in May or June.

CAMBODIA 3

Phnom Penh is again calm under strict security measures. Lon Non is trying to blame some of the recent student-teacher unrest on Sirik Matak.

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Clearing operations along the Mekong have restored some measure of government control.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The Military Situation

North Vietnamese forces in Quang Tri Province on 18 March may have established another foothold on the south bank of the Thach Han River, southwest of the provincial capital. If confirmed, this would be the second such penetration of the government's northernmost front line in less than two weeks. The recent attacks along the Thach Han, as well as renewed shellings east of Quang Tri City, appear designed to cover Communist resupply activities a few miles farther north in the Dong Ha area. According to photography [redacted] 25X1 the Communists have built a pontoon bridge across a river at Dong Ha. Boats, vehicles, and troop concentrations were also visible.

In the Saigon area, the Communists are maintaining pressure against the government listening 25X1
25X1 posts at Rach Bap and Tonle Cham, along the Saigon River corridor. [redacted]

North Vietnamese JMC Members Returning to Hanoi

A total of 101 members of Hanoi's contingent in the Four-Party Joint Military Commission (JMC) have returned to Hanoi since 27 February, according to the US Embassy. This leaves 724 North Vietnamese JMC members (out of 825 positions allotted by the treaty) still in the south. The decrease in North Vietnamese representation has not been offset by the expected increase in the number of Viet Cong delegates. Despite signs that the Viet Cong intend to assign additional representatives to the JMC before the four-party version goes out of business, less than one fourth of their authorized complement has surfaced so far.

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Village Elections

The government is preparing to resume village council elections, which were suspended last May during the Communist offensive. Dates for the new elections have not yet been announced, but officials in the delta expect them sometime in May or June. Earlier this month, President Thieu informed province chiefs that the elections would take place only in relatively secure government-controlled areas. This would rule out any overt Communist participation, barring any future agreement by the two sides in their Paris talks.

The decision to resume the elections reflects the government's desire to show its own constitutional legitimacy at the local level in connection with the political negotiations with the Viet Cong. The government probably also wants an early test of the efforts it has made since the cease-fire to improve its political position in the countryside. Government officials will work hard to elect Democracy Party members to the village councils.

Despite these new elections, the Thieu government undoubtedly will use measures decreed late last year to keep a close check on local governments. Hamlet chief elections were abolished at that time and are not to be resumed. In addition, decrees reducing the size of village councils and authorizing dismissal of village chiefs for "violating national policy" will serve to limit the authority of the village officials. [redacted]

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CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh Calm

The US Embassy reports that Phnom Penh remains exceptionally quiet as government authorities continue to take precautionary measures to prevent any recurrence of the bombing attack and of the student-teacher incident that occurred on 17 March. The chief of the Cambodian Air Force is being removed, and six air force officers who belong to the royal family have been temporarily suspended from their jobs. Restrictions have been placed on foreign travel and those on public meetings tightened. There is still no definite word on the whereabouts of the disaffected pilot who carried out the bombing, but a Khmer insurgent propaganda broadcast has claimed that he landed his plane in a "liberated area." [redacted]

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Diminishing Political Unity

Strict security measures being imposed by the government seem likely to further diminish prospects for political unity. Acting under the state of emergency declared on 17 March, the government has tightened population controls--which now include a ban on all public meetings. There are also unconfirmed reports that some newspaper editors and teacher and student leaders have been arrested.

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President Lon Nol is probably relying in large part on his younger brother, Lon Non, to enforce the emergency measures. Lon Non is eager to do so.

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The Military Situation

Cambodian clearing operations along the Mekong reportedly have restored some measure of government control along several sections of the river south of Neak Luong. As a result, the regular Mekong supply convoy that had delayed its departure from Tan Chau in South Vietnam is scheduled to sail for Phnom Penh on 20 March.

South of Phnom Penh, the government units that recently reoccupied Chambak on Route 2 are now moving down the highway toward Takeo. If these units can maintain their present rate of advance, Route 2 should soon be reopened between Phnom Penh and Takeo. [redacted]

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